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17 dead at Fla. school

Suspect is a former student who was identified as a threat to others, teacher says

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Montgomery's Georgia Washington Middle School is expected to be closed and sold. ALBERT CESARE/ADVERTISER FILE

Georgia Washington sale draws criticism

One opponent says school's fate is a 'civil rights issue'

Andrew J. Yawn Montgomery Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Four days after the expected closure and sale of Georgia Washington Middle School was announced, citizens, school alumni and Montgomery school board members voiced clear and cutting opposition.

One called it a "civil rights issue." Lovey Ross, a 1964 Georgia Washington graduate, called the sale "racially motivated."

Montgomery County Board of Education member Durden Dean said MPS is "at war for the hearts and minds of students." Arica Watkins-Smith, another

board member, called it "segregation" and the closure of Georgia Washington and three other schools a "deliberate dismantling" of the Montgomery Public Schools system.

"Georgia Washington founded the school because of segregation. You take a predominantly black middle school and sell it to a predominantly white school system. That is segregation," Watkins-Smith said at the MCBOE meeting at G.W. Carver High School on Tuesday after the public comments period was dominated by complaints against the announced closure.

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Georgia Washington CONTRIBUTED

State workers may get 3% raise

Senate committee gives its approval to budget

Brian Lyman
Montgomery Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

State employees would see their first cost of living increase in nearly a decade under a General Fund budget approved Wednesday by a Senate committee.

The 2019 General Fund, which goes into effect Oct. 1, would also provide a total increase of \$80 million to the Alabama Department of Corrections, with the goal of improving staffing and mental health care in the state's prisons. The budget added money to the Alabama Medicaid Agency, which provides coverage to about 1 million Alabamians, most of whom are children, elderly and the disabled. It also allocated money to hire about 30 new state troopers.

"It's balanced to the best of our ability," said Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, the chairman of the Senate Finance and Taxation General Fund Committee. "The appropriations we made are going to be based on the revenues we expect to get based on people going to work every day."

The \$2 billion General Fund would be the largest in a decade. During and after the Great Recession, the General Fund lurched from crisis to crisis due to its mostly-flat revenue streams. This year, growth in internet sales taxes, estimated at about \$40 million, and about \$92 million in carry-forward money from last year's budget gave legislators some breathing room.

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New districts' requirements would rise

Several cities have formed their own school systems

Brian Lyman Montgomery Advertiser
USA TODAY NETWORK

Legislation that would increase the minimum population required to form an independent school district drew strong reactions in a Senate committee Wednesday.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Linda Coleman-Madison, D-Birmingham, would require an incorporated municipality to have at least 25,000 people — up from the current 5,000 — to establish a school district.

lish a school district.

The legislation would also require the new school district to submit information to the Alabama State Department of Education to allow the department to determine whether the new district would match per-pupil spending in the old district and whether the formation of a new system would adversely affect a county school system's revenues.

Several cities, including Pike Road in Montgomery and Saraland in Mobile

County, have formed their own school systems in recent years. Existing break-away systems would be grandfathered in under Coleman-Madison's bill.

In Jefferson County, Gardendale has tried to form its own system but has faced lawsuits over its attempt to do so.

On Tuesday, a three-judge federal panel upheld a lower court ruling that found Gardendale "acted with a discriminatory purpose to exclude black children from the proposed school system." Gardendale officials, who deny any discriminatory intent, said they plan to appeal.

Coleman-Madison said the bill was not aimed at Gardendale, but the situation was on the minds of supporters and opponents of the bill Wednesday. Mark Gaines, an attorney representing Gardendale, said "the bill as drafted could not do more to target Gardendale."

"Municipalities that want to form their own school system do so because their residents want it," he said. "The individual residents of those cities have made the determination and indeed

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USA TODAY

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Legislature

Bill would strike anti-LGBT language from Alabama's sex education law. 3A

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